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CHOOSE AND BE CHOSEN: THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

Mitchell S. Ratner

Tată e minier. Mamă e filatoare. Fratele meu cel mare este șofer. Tatăl lui Cezar este topograf. Tatăl lui Gigel este macaragui. Fiecare om își alege o meserie. Și eu, când voi fi mare, voi avea o meserie.

My father is a miner. My mother is a textile worker. My older brother is a professional driver. Cezar's father is a topographer. Gigel's father is a crane operator. Everyone chooses an occupation. I, too, when I am grown, will have an occupation.

(From the Abecedar, the first school reader given to Romanian children)

The Problem

The general problem addressed by my research in Romania has concerned the processes whereby a young generation becomes distributed within the occupational structure of a society: How does it happen that some become miners and others truck drivers, while a few are topographers?

To study this problem in contemporary Romania leads necessarily to the study of educational institutions; to an unprecedented degree, entry into occupational roles is now based on completion of formal school programs. This is true in Romania not only for the occupations we customarily associate with schooling, such as teachers or doctors, but a relevant diploma is also necessary for the waitress, the auto mechanic, and increasingly even for the party activist.

However, due to the growing proliferation of concrete possibilities, the changing circumstances of each generation, and the tremendous variability within Romanian society, even the more limited question, "Who gets educated for what and why" is tremendously complex. In this paper I will focus on the distribution of primary school students within the network of high school programs in Cluj county, and particularly the experience of the students from four primary schools whom I followed closely during the academic year 1977-78.

It is useful to begin with an overview of the three key selection points in the educational system of Romania. The first occurs after the eighth grade. It is the transition from primary schooling, based on a common national curriculum, to a specialized high school program. Since two years of high school are now compulsory, the question is not whether

the child will go to high school, but which of the wide variety of possible high school programs he or she will enter. The tenth grade transition marks the end of the compulsory schooling period. At this point young people can enter directly into the work force, or they can continue their education at a professional school for vocational specialization, or they can enter a program for an additional two years of high school. The twelfth grade transition, of course, concerns only those who do continue through high school, about 40% of the total. The possibilities after graduation are to either enter an institute of higher education or to enter the workforce. The number who enter higher educational institutions each year is but a fraction of those who apply. For example, in Cluj-Napoca in 1978 only 23 percent of those who applied were admitted. The national figures during the late 1970s were roughly that, out of every eight twenty-year olds, only one would become a university student.

However, the processes that determine who will or will not be among the higher education students begins well before the time to apply for admission. The eighth grade transition is particularly important because the high school a child enters greatly affects the child's future possibilities, both in terms of occupation and in terms of successfully negotiating the tenth grade and twelfth grade transition to further education. Let me illustrate this with some quick sketches of research results.

I worked most intensively during 1977-78 with two high schools. Central City High School became in 1977 a mathematics-physics high school and until then had been one of the most highly respected "theoretical" high schools in Cluj-Napoca. Good Worker Industrial High School had been formed eight years before from a professional school. It had been recommended to me as a particularly well-run industrial school. During the tenth grade transition all the Central City tenth graders continued on in high school, while at Good Worker only 22 percent continued on. The others entered the work force or enrolled in professional school. The differences during the twelfth grade transition were just as striking. At Central City, of the 75 students with whom I worked, 73 took university entrance exams and 57 entered (76 percent of the total). At Good Worker only 22 of the 72 students I studied took exams for higher education and only one passed successfully (one percent of the total). I should mention that these researched groups were chosen almost a full year before the entrance exams with no expectation that the differences would be so great. A more complete analysis of the context and causes of these differences will be the subject of another paper. Here, they serve as a prelude to a discussion of the crucial eighth grade transition.

The High School Network

A good starting point for the analysis of the eighth grade transition involves an understanding of what options are possible for youth and how it came to be that these and not others are available. One of the features of

Romania's educational system is that because it is part of a centrally planned society we know the numerical outcomes before the process of selection begins. For secondary education, which includes both halves of high school and vocational school, a county school plan is approved each spring which details which programs will be offered at each high school the following fall and how many students will be enrolled. In the planning process, the essential elements taken into consideration are the number of youths in the county, the present and future manpower needs of the county by domains of economic activity and skill level, and the overall national plan for economic development.

The planning process for the 1978 school year began in the fall of 1977 when county educational and administrative bodies developed their initial proposal. They submitted their plan to the Ministry of Education which totaled the various county plans and then held conferences with economic ministries and the State Committee for Planning. The adjusted national plan was then approved by the Council of Ministers and each county's part of the plan was passed back to local officials. Once the plan was established, county officials had only limited authority to make adjustments as problems arose. Any changes involving the overall composition of programs could only be made with the approval of the Ministry of Education.

Broadly speaking there were nine types of high schools. They were oriented either to economic domains, including industry, agriculture, commerce, and health; or focused on academic disciplines, including math-physics, natural sciences, pedagogy, languages-history, and art. Table 1 presents the types of high schools, the number of schools of each type in the county, the number of entering students called for in the 1978 county plan, and what percent of all ninth graders each type of school would contain. In terms of number of students, industrial schools clearly predominate.

The nine high school types were further broken down into 33 different "profiles" or programs of study. Within the industrial schools there are a total of ten different programs, but each school offered only one to four of these. Cluj-Chem Industrial High School, for example, was associated with Cluj-Chem Pharmaceutical factory and has entering high school programs in industrial chemistry, mechanics, and electronics.

The programs differ in the language of instruction as well. Cluj County is about one quarter Hungarian and almost all the programs were offered in Hungarian as well as Romanian. There was also one industrial high school class in mechanics taught in German.

The programs differed, of course, in the number of places available. To cite the extremes, in 1978 there were 3,780 places available in the mechanics programs at industrial high schools in Romanian and three places at the Pedagogical High School for pre-school teaching in Hungarian.

TABLE 1

Type of High Schools	Number of Schools	Number of Students in 9th Grade Plan	Percent
Industrial	26	8,460	77%
Agricultural	1	550	5
Commercial	2	432	4
Health	1	144	1
Math-Physics	5	900	8
Natural Sciences	1	111	1
Pedagogy	1	81	1
Languages-History (including Physical Education)	1	169	2
Art	1	126	1
TOTAL	39	10,973	100%

Selection

The process of entrance into the various high school programs occurs through enrollment and, when necessary, testing. Just after the end of the school year all graduated eighth graders were required to enroll in a high school program, either at one of the 39 high schools situated in urban centers, or at one of the 26 affiliated primary schools in rural areas which offered industrial programs under the control and guidance of the major industrial high schools.

One enrolls at a school for a specific program and language. If the number of applicants during the enrollment period is equal to or less than the number of places, then all who enroll are accepted. If the program is over-enrolled and if sufficient numbers cannot be persuaded to change their choice of program or choice of school, then an exam will be given to reduce the candidates to the number of places allocated.

The exams are essentially achievement tests designed to test mastery of the eighth grade curriculum in certain subjects. In 1978, all schools gave exams in mathematics and Romanian with questions supplied by the Ministry of Education.

The Romanian exam had a literature part which required an essay and a second part requiring grammatical analysis of a complicated proposition.

The mathematics exam presented problems in algebra and trigonometry which required both a good command of algebraic transformations and a memorized knowledge of requisite formulas. In the interest of fairness, special provisions were made for those whose eighth grade class was taught in a language other than Romanian.

The exams were graded without names, averaged, rank-ordered, and only then identified and posted. Those whose scores fell below the cut-off point for the particular school and program were given back their enrollment papers and redirected to schools where there were still unoccupied places. Those who do not enter a desired program are left with a highly reduced range of options: the difference between just getting in and just missing out may have great ramifications on an individual's educational and occupational career.

Ideally, as conceived by Romanian educational planners, eighth grade students would be guided in their choice of high school programs so that an exam would only rarely be required. For a variety of reasons admission exams are in fact frequent. In 1978, 55 percent of the eighth graders enrolled in over-solicited programs and therefore had to take exams. Of these students, 64 percent remained in the chosen programs and 36 percent (or 20 percent of all eighth graders) were left to find unoccupied places in programs where exams had not been given.

During my fieldwork I worked intensively with four eighth grade classrooms; each was chosen to represent a point on what can broadly be considered a traditional/rural to modern/urban continuum. The following section discusses the four classrooms and the educational outcomes that were desired and attained.

Four Schools

Public School Mountain Top was chosen to represent the traditional/rural end of the continuum. Though the school is only 50 kilometers from Cluj, located in a mountainous community of scattered households, geography and economic factors contribute to a sense of isolation much greater than the distance alone connotes. The main source of income was private agriculture and animal raising with non-mechanized technologies. Incomes were low, modern conveniences few, and there was a low level of adult formal education: few parents had more than four years of education and many had less.

Typically the children did not think about their future occupation until they were forced to by the obligation to continue compulsory education at another school. Many had never been to a city, others had visited only once or twice. Their perspective of the outside world was limited. They had knowledge of very few professions: most of the boys wanted to be mechanics or drivers and a great many of the girls wanted to be seamstresses. Only a few of the best students had aspirations for which

even a high school education was necessary. Several wanted to be primary school teachers and several others wanted to be bookkeepers.

During the enrollment period, the largest number of students enrolled at a neighboring village where there was an affiliated industrial program in mechanics. A second large group enrolled in various urban schools in industrial programs or agricultural mechanics. Finally, nine enrolled in pedagogical, commercial, and electronic programs where exams were given. This number included the school's best students, yet all nine failed to achieve the minimum scores necessary for entry and all were redirected to industrial school programs where places remained.

The children at Public School Hilly Dale are more typical of the rural children in the county and in the country at large. Though they were rural, industrialization, urbanization, and education had already made large inroads into their lives. Many parents, or friends and relatives of parents, were working or had worked in non-agricultural occupations. Most importantly, virtually all families maintained close relations with relatives who had moved to the city. Often these relatives were skilled workers and not infrequently they had higher education.

Though the village in which the school was situated was but a few kilometers closer to Cluj-Napoca than Mountain Top, its geographical setting made it much more accessible. While there was but one bus a day operating between Cluj-Napoca and Mountain Top, there were eight buses daily to Cluj-Napoca and Hilly Dale.

Moreover, schools have existed longer in Hilly Dale and adults had more formal education, usually at least four years and often seven years. Television and city trips presented the children with an image of life different from their village. For most, the basic assumption of their life was that they would go to a high school in the city, learn a trade, and then settle down in the city. In their aspirations they showed much better knowledge of industrial occupations than the children at Mountain Top and a deeper commitment to specific trades or branches of the economy.

When time came to choose, personal networks were the key factor for many children. They were primarily interested in acquiring a good trade and might choose among the various possibilities because an older brother or cousin was at a particular school, or because their uncle's next-door neighbor taught at the school and recommended it. Many would simply go along with a good friend. In this way certain schools became favorites within particular families and villages.

The best students were encouraged by their teachers to follow their intellectual interests--five of the 45 enrolled at some of the most selective of the non-industrial high school programs such as mathematics-informational sciences. Others enrolled in the more difficult industrial programs such as electronics and industrial chemistry. The results of the selection process were mixed for Hilly Dale. As at Mountain Top almost

everyone wound up at an industrial school, although six succeeded in entering the more selective industrial programs such as food technology and electronics and two girls gained entrance to the economics high school. However, of the five best students in the school who enrolled in the "good" city non-industrial schools, only one managed to pass the exam and actually enter the program.

Fourteen of the 45 who were eliminated from programs as a result of exams re-enrolled in industrial programs where places remained open in construction materials and agricultural mechanics.

Public School New City is located in Cluj-Napoca in one of the recently built apartment complexes which house tens of thousands on the periphery of the city. Students at New City are primarily children of an earlier wave of rural-urban migration. Almost all of their parents had been born in rural areas and had come to the city after completing four or seven years of compulsory education. Typically, the eighth graders' fathers were industrial workers, though there was also an engineer, a teacher, and an army officer.

Almost all the eighth graders were either born in the city or had lived the greater part of their lives in the city. They knew much more about urban occupations than did their country cousins. When asked about occupational goals, rather than simply saying "worker," as many of the rural children did, they specified metal polisher or worker in the cosmetics industry, frequently adding technician or master craftsman. Many more than in the country aspire to occupations which require higher education, and even here they are often quite specific--electronics engineer or English-Romanian translator.

When it came time to choose, factors such as future employment possibilities and the probability of entering a desired school seemed foremost in many minds. The students and their parents were often quite sophisticated in these matters. They considered not only the program of the high school, but also the work conditions in the specific factory to which a high school was linked. They often knew well the small differences between industrial occupations in terms of which paid higher wages and which had higher status in the factory.

Considerations involving entrance examinations greatly occupied the New City eighth graders and their parents and teachers. The basic problem was how to allow the child to continue in the direction and level desired by the child and parents, while at the same time minimizing the chances of failing an exam and having to drastically re-orient. The students and their parents were ever alert to possibilities which might minimize this risk. Many enrolled in one program and then switched to another before the final day: for example, from a mathematical-mechanics program in one school where there would be an exam, to one in another school where there would be none.

The final counting showed this class predominantly in industrial high schools (74 percent), but well-represented in the non-industrial program as well, especially mathematics-physics and languages-history. Of the 38 students, 27 took exams at the school of their choice and 14 of these entered, although with only one exception the scores were not high but just above the minimum needed. The big surprise was that of the five highly qualified girls who sought to enter the health high school only one succeeded in achieving the necessary score and entering. The other four were re-oriented to under-enrolled industrial programs.

The eighth grade students at Central City School represent the other end of the continuum from Mountain Top. Central City School, as mentioned earlier, was for many years an academic or theoretical high school recognized as among the best in Romania. In 1977, because of changes in secondary education that eliminated theoretical schools, the school's profile was changed to mathematics-physics.

For a number of residential and social reasons the parents of the eighth grade class, especially the fathers, were primarily university educated. Teachers, professors, doctors and lawyers were in special abundance, though there was also a sizable minority of skilled workers and technicians.

In terms of aspirations, from the fourth grade on, almost all of the students saw themselves almost exclusively as future engineers, doctors, and scientific researchers. The standards set by the teachers in the school were high and both the student's family and peer group encouraged serious academic work. The result was an eighth grade class of academically very well prepared students.

When the time came at the end of the eighth grade to choose a high school, for most there was little to consider. The great majority was quite happy to stay at this same mathematics-physics high school to be prepared for the highly skilled occupations they had chosen. A few enrolled elsewhere where they hoped for less competition and a few enrolled in equally competitive schools that had programs more closely tailored to their occupational goals.

The exam period proved just how well prepared the class was. Of the 38 students who graduated in June, 36 enrolled in schools where there were exams and 34 entered, 28 at Central City mathematics-physics high school, three at the school for biological sciences, and three at other schools. To appreciate how well this class did, their exam scores can be compared to those at the other schools: over 80 percent of this class scored higher than any of the students from Mountain Top and Hilly Dale and better than all but one of the students from New City.

Influences on Choice and Selection

In this section I wish to consider separately some of the most important factors which led to the patterning just summarized. In particular I will consider the effects that individual characteristics, the school attended, the exam system, and the student's family have on successfully negotiating the eighth grade, as well as later, transitions.

Individual Factors Certainly individual characteristics such as temperament, aptitude, physiology, and personal interest have an importance in relation to where a child attends high school and ultimately in which occupation he or she will work as an adult. Some characteristics work as hindrances--the congenitally weak son of the miner will not become a miner. Some work as propelling forces--the talented daughter of the peasant who taught herself to play the flute at age five may, on the basis of her remarkable musical talent, make it to the music high school and a musical career.

The single most important individual characteristic is probably general intelligence. The exams along the way are based on the ability to manipulate concepts and to memorize. Seriously lacking these abilities, no matter what other advantages one has, one will not make it through the transition to higher education.

However, as the controversies surrounding I.Q. tests have brought out, most personal characteristics are tied to the individual's social surroundings. Remarkable exceptions notwithstanding, in seeking to understand the eighth grade transition in Cluj county, and the general problem of occupational choice in Romania, I have found that the consideration of biologically derived individual characteristics separated from the social context is of limited utility.

The School It is useful to consider the forces that were actively at work in each of the schools to produce the outcomes I have indicated. In other words, how may the future of a particular child of average ability be affected by attending the various schools?

The most important differences among the schools concerned the learning environment. Though the curriculum was essentially the same in all four schools, the quality of instruction ascends from Mountain Top to Central City. Even the best teachers could not thoroughly teach the rigorous eighth grade math curriculum to a class where many were still having difficulty with basic mathematical operations.

Children at urban schools and, especially at Central City, simply receive a much sounder basic education than their rural counterparts. The effects of skills like writing style and speaking ease will last a lifetime. The difference in educational levels of the various schools is not lost on many college educated parents who reside in rural areas. The children of priests, teachers, doctors, and agronomists are regularly sent

to city relatives to enroll in schools like Central City. Many are sent as early as the fifth grade and most by the seventh or eighth.

The schools also differ in the manner in which they approach the job of professional orientation, of informing and counseling their students about the educational and occupational opportunities open to them. In the rural schools, occupational information is most often abstract and general; the teachers as well as the students frequently have little sense of what entering technological professions such as crane operator or computer programmer entails. Also, the information the rural teachers pass on concerning admission procedures is frequently misleading or totally inaccurate. The rural teachers are on the cultural periphery; they rarely come in contact with other high school teachers, educational administrators, professional orientation specialists, and others who could keep them abreast of educational developments.

Finally, the schools differed in how well they prepared those seeking entrance to a competitive program. This is, I think, the key to Central City students' phenomenally high scores. For months before the end of the school year, several times a week whenever free hours could be found in the academic schedule, the Romanian and math teachers held special classes oriented solely to the high school entrance exam. Then, in the several weeks between the end of school and the exam, virtually all the students came each day for exam preparation sessions, and then returned home to do homework for the next day's session.

When the day of the exam came the students from Central City were like a fully trained basketball team playing a pick-up team: they simply overran the competition. At New City, there were also review sessions, but they were less frequent, less disciplined, and less well attended. In contrast, at the rural schools the students were urged to study for exams if they expected to encounter them, but were given little concrete aid. They were largely left on their own to prepare as best they could.

The Families In Romania, as in most of the world, children learn their most basic cognitive and emotional orientations in their family circle. Throughout life immediate family members share common experiences and work toward common goals. Parents choose pre-school and primary school programs for their children with an eye toward later-life educational and occupational decisions. The families are not passive background factors, but rather active participants in the process of educational selection. Sometimes at the eighth grade level the parents' role completely overshadows that of the child. There were students who responded to the question, "Where do you want to attend school next year?" with the response, "My father (or my parents) want me to go..."

A useful theoretical orientation is to consider the family and the child as a team, competing against other teams, with the goal of placing the child most favorably within the educational and occupational structures

of the society. One can then legitimately ask, what is it that families contribute and how does it affect outcome?

One contribution of the family is clearly the aspirations they give to their children. Generally, this varies fairly directly with social categories, with each instilling in children the desire to be in the parents' social category, or the next higher.

Many of the children at Central City, especially those from intellectual families, had never in their lives thought of being anything else besides a doctor, teacher, or engineer. In contrast, working class parents at schools like New City usually instilled in their children a healthy respect for the industrial trades and primary productive work. Many of these working class parents would have liked to see their children go on to the university, but other options were acceptable as well. Typically, they anticipated that their children would enter factories after the tenth or twelfth grade as skilled workers; perhaps later they would become master craftsmen or shop foremen. A number commented to me, "That's a good honest living, and well-paid, too." In these working class families higher education is a possibility--if the children are smart enough, or if the children work hard enough--but it is not an expected outcome.

In peasant families the common aspiration was for the children to acquire almost any industrial occupation as long as it paid a steady wage and was easier, drier, and cleaner than the agricultural labors of the peasants. The idea of higher education was so far removed from their reality that most children never even considered the possibility. When educational aspirations did develop, often they came through the extended family, for example, from an aunt with an engineering degree who came to visit and served as a role model.

Another contribution the family made was in terms of system knowledge. Children did not enter higher education or the desired trades just because they wanted to. It is a multi-year process, and insofar as parents had a solid understanding of the educational system and the selection process, they could considerably improve their child's chances.

As the time came for the eighth grade transition, a parent with system knowledge would monitor the child's work in the required subjects, talking knowledgeably to teachers about low marks, pinpointing weaknesses in preparation and generally insuring that the child was as well prepared as possible. This sort of parent would also be able to advise their child on the choice of available schools, perhaps consulting with knowledgeable friends and relatives about such factors as the amount and level of probable competition at different schools.

On the other extreme, a family with little system knowledge would leave the child's education to chance. A bad school or a bad teacher is quietly endured. Little contact is established with the school and the child is left to plot his or her own educational and occupational strategy. The

family may even unknowingly act in ways which hurt the child's chances, for example, by asking for time and labor during the several week study period before the eighth grade exam.

Often the system knowledge of the family has the most importance in a crisis situation: what do you do if the child is sick for several weeks, is having problems with a particular teacher, or has just missed entering a desired program? How well these sorts of difficulties are resolved influence the child's chance of attaining his or her aspirations.

Another important influence on education and occupation are the financial resources of the family unit. This holds true even though education at all levels is state supported and without charge, and an extensive system of cash support exists for children from poor families at the secondary and university level.

During the primary years, poorer families, especially in rural areas, depend on the child's labor to help maintain the family as an economic unit. Often children as young as nine or ten will have extensive chores both before and after school and will be kept home from school altogether during periods of seasonal need in agriculture. Families with extensive financial resources, on the other hand, can afford the educational extras useful to building both knowledge and experience. There will be more books, more toys, more trips, and more chances for the child to explore his capabilities through various hobbies. In many intellectual and financially solid families private tutoring in foreign languages begins in pre-school and continues uninterrupted through primary and secondary education.

Financial considerations enter into the choice of schools and occupations in several ways, especially at the tenth grade transition. The financial support system is structured so that the relative chances of any child receiving a full stipend for room and board is greater at the industrial schools than at the university oriented high schools. After the tenth grade, financial support is assured at professional schools, but uncertain for all but the best students attending high school. What also enters into many families' calculations is how soon the child can begin earning an income to aid the family budget. This is a pressure particularly felt by the older children in large families. The immediate funds obtainable through factory work take precedence over the benefits that might be gained by graduating as an engineer or language teacher after five to seven more years of schooling.

Finally, through the use of costly private tutoring to prepare students for examinations, financial resources can have a direct bearing on who succeeds at the various transitions. What amounts to a private school system parallel to the state financed public schools has arisen in Romania in response to the rise of competition in school admission. It is most prevalent at the high school level in preparation for college admissions, but is also extensive in some schools at the tenth grade level and is emerging as a phenomenon at the eighth grade level (e.g. four of the

Central City eighth graders had private tutors in mathematics). Generally, two sorts of children get tutors. For those who are in good schools but not doing well, their parents hire tutors to improve their performance so that they can keep up with their school work. In other cases, tutors are hired for students who are doing well or even very well in their school subjects but whose parents would like them to master the important subjects to perfection. Tutors are hired to increase the chances of the child passing highly competitive exams and entering the university in especially desirable fields.

It was usual for a child oriented to the polytechnic to have two hours a week of tutoring in mathematics and two hours a week in physics straight through the four years of high school. Many parents believe that a year of tutoring in the exam subjects is the absolute minimum necessary. This is especially true for those desiring the most competitive faculties. In my sample, of those who entered medical school, all had six or more hours of tutoring per week during the last year or had parents who were themselves doctors and could adequately direct the exam preparation. Since the cost of university exam tutoring generally runs from 40-100 lei per hour, many of the families were paying 1200 lei a month for tutoring, roughly the monthly income of a collective farm worker or an unskilled worker.

Just how important tutoring and financial resources currently are in relation to university admissions is difficult to assess due to the lack of any sound published studies. The figures one does hear usually relate to the social compositions of all university students: roughly one-third from intellectual families, one-third from workers, and one-third from peasant families. These figures are, of course, the averages across the university; they do not account for the predominance of intellectuals' children in such prestigious occupations as medicine, architecture, and electronics, nor their scarcity in metallurgy and agriculture.

While at least assuring us that the universities have not become elite monopolies, the above figures do not answer the question of the effect of social category on the probability of entrance. My own rough calculations based on several assumptions show that the statistical probability that a child of an intellectual will enter the university is currently upwards of 70 percent, while the corresponding figure for a child from a working class or peasant family is roughly 10 percent.

The final influence I wish to discuss involves the emotional resources of the family. In a family high in emotional resources the child is loved for whom he or she is. There is real warmth and concern between the members of the family. The parents are willing to sacrifice for their children's future, and the children in turn are able to both respect and learn from their elders. In essence, I am talking about a healthy family life which produces strong, vital children. Whereas aspirations, financial resources, and educational know-how all vary directly with the social economic status of the parents, this element does not. Though it is devilishly difficult to quantify, its effects are often determinative. A family low in

emotional resources cannot make use of its other advantages, and a family high in such resources may well be able to overcome many disadvantages.

Let me give two examples. One concerns a girl from an intellectual family with prestige and financial resources. Her father holds an important position as an economist, her mother is a trained accountant. The family has traveled together extensively throughout western Europe. As a young girl she had wanted to be a doctor, but in high school turned, as many young women do, to the family profession and oriented herself towards the economic faculty. She was bright and a good student. Statistically she was a prime candidate for entrance, but she failed miserably. Later it came out that her parents had been in the process of separating. They frequently fought with one another at home and sometimes even struck their daughter. The mother was often unreasonably severe with this 19-year-old girl, not letting her dance at school parties, for example. The girl's strategy had become to spend as little time at home as possible. Under such conditions there was no possible way for her to prepare adequately for the exam. After failing the entrance exam, she decided to work for a year, move out on her own, and try the exam again the following year.

The other example concerns a rural family from Hilly Dale which is in the process of producing three honor students. One was in the ninth grade at a very good math-physics high school and the others were in the eighth and fifth grades. One night I was asking the father about his daily routine. He described a 14-hour work day which combined a salaried position as animal keeper at the collective's barn, the care and milking of his own animals, and joining his wife in field work on various plots. On some evenings, he said, he might watch a little T.V. I asked if he ever read in his spare time. He said humbly but without remorse, "No, we are too tied to the ground to be fond of reading. We work hard now so that they can read."

This sort of love, if not in the short run, then in the long run, is equal to a whole lot of system knowledge and financial resources.

Conclusions

The manner in which the Romanians have organized occupational distribution in general and the eighth grade transition in particular can be analyzed from a number of perspectives. From the perspective of labor supply the outcomes are more or less expected and desired: that is, the number of people trained in each occupational specialty is roughly equivalent to the number of people needed in the Romanian economy. Despite miscalculations that result in an occasional abundance or shortage of workers with specific skills, in comparison with other developing countries, Romania's record is impressive.

From the perspective of providing equal educational opportunity to its young people, Romania's record is less impressive. As the data in this

paper illustrate, young people attending rural schools overwhelmingly enter industrial high school programs after the eighth grade and most enter the workforce as industrial workers after the tenth grade. In contrast, young people who come from highly educated urban families and who attend certain select elementary schools overwhelmingly enter non-industrial high schools after the eighth grade, continue in them after the tenth grade, and go on to the university in prestigious fields. Young people from urban, working class backgrounds maintain an intermediate position. While most enter industrial occupations after the tenth or twelfth grades, a sizable minority is able to enter the career path that leads to higher education and a high status occupation.

To some extent these outcomes are the result of a state-operated selection system that unfairly favors certain types of young people. Many very bright and very competent young people from rural schools and from working class urban schools are not able to enter professions such as medicine, engineering, and architecture, even though they very much desire to do so. Many believed that they were not able to enter these occupations because they were not smart enough, or because they did not have the aptitude, when in reality it was because others were better prepared for the exams and had more family resources to support them.

The loss is not only personal, affecting young people and their families, but also societal. Any state that squanders its rare human resources will over the long run lessen its own prosperity.

I believe that much of this system-induced inequality can be reduced by changing some of the exam and enrollment procedures that were in operation in 1978. A crucial part of the selection process involves the exam questions themselves. Insofar as the exams at each of the transitions test almost entirely for achievement--what was learned, and not for potential or what could be learned--they discriminate against the talented but poorly trained. The extra preparation of pupils at schools like Central City is effective in producing higher test scores only to the extent that the exams are ones that can be prepared for.

Another crucial part of the process involves the high school enrollment and admissions procedures. As they operated in 1978, they had an "all or nothing" quality. That is, those who apply to competitive schools often either enter the program they most desire or are redirected to programs that are unrelated to their interests and aptitudes. For example, the girls from Mountain Top who failed to enter the pedagogical and commercial programs were essentially forced into industrial mechanics programs. The drastic redirection obviously affects most those whose aspirations are slightly greater than their exam preparation. The only rationale I can find for the present procedure is that it is convenient for high school administrators. However, it would not be difficult to construct a procedure that is more equitable for the young people, one that would allow pupils of high potential who just miss entering the most competitive schools to enter programs of their second choice. This change

would also encourage young people of all abilities to apply for programs they really desire rather than programs they feel confident of entering.

A final perspective from which to view the occupational distribution process and the eighth grade transition is with regard to its effect on the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. For many in Romania this transitional period is relatively short. After the eighth grade transition, when they are 14 years old, their life-long career pattern has already been firmly set. After the tenth grade transition, when they are 16, many enter the workforce with adult responsibilities.

For other young Romanians the transition period is longer, but also tremendously stressful. From the time they are 13 until the time they are 19, they are under almost constant pressure to prepare for and do well on examinations that will have great consequences for their future life. Much of the stress related to occupational selection that occurs among Americans only in their adult years must be dealt with by Romanians in their teenage years. In either case, whether the transition is short or stressful, there is little chance for hidden talents and aptitudes to be discovered and nurtured, especially those that are not immediately relevant to examinations or productive work.

Inevitably there will be a tension in Romania or in any industrial society between the economic need of having skilled workers trained relatively inexpensively, the social need of equal opportunity and the personal need of individuals to find fulfillment in their lives and work. Unfortunately, at any historical moment meeting one of these needs effectively often means meeting other needs less effectively. There is no magic solution. Perhaps the most that can be hoped for is that a society will recognize all three dimensions and, over time, will be better able to meet each of them.

Notes

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2. Because I wish to focus on certain tendencies and not on specific schools or individuals, the names of the schools are fictitious, and non-essential identifying information has been altered.

3. With but a few laudable exceptions, the best teachers are not at places like Mountain Top or Hilly Dale. The career pattern for teachers is for the least experienced to begin their teaching at isolated schools like Mountain Top and, as they gain experience and seniority, to move to more favorable schools. The order of preference and career pattern is Mountain Top, Hilly Dale, New City, and against stiff competition, Central City.